

COMMENTARY

ISRAEL WATCHES AND WAITS

And Keeps Its Powder Dry

A. V. SHERMAN

JERUSALEM

WHEN Ben Gurion rejected an opposition request for a Knesset debate on foreign policy early in September, with the explanation that so far as Israel was concerned nothing had happened to make her reformulate her policies, he expressed one of the underlying assumptions of Israel's present approach to foreign affairs: that the only permanent feature in Arab political life is its instability.

At the time of writing—the ubiquitous qualification in Middle Eastern political commentary—Israel is enjoying the calm to the full. With the British in Jordan, the Americans in the Lebanon, the UN in Gaza, and the Arabs engaged in recriminations, blood-letting, and mass trials for the most unlikely conspiracies, the borders are as quiet as they are ever likely to be. But no one here is prepared to act on the assumption that the

present constellation will remain. A few bursts of machine-gun fire in one of the Arab capitals, another *crise de conscience* in the White House, a new Russian weapon, and the present unstable equilibrium would be upset. The progress in Israeli political attitudes, however, is gratifying, in the light of the myths prevalent here a few years ago. Ten years, after all, is a fairly short time for liberals and socialists to learn the facts of life regarding world affairs, as a glance at Britain will show.

When the State of Israel was established, the assumptions underlying its foreign policy were fairly straightforward Second International mythology. It was assumed that Israel would be able to remain neutral and "non-identified" if she really tried hard enough; that the 1949 armistice agreements with the Arabs would as a matter of course develop into peace treaties, "normalization" (whatever that may mean in the Middle East), and later on into brotherly cooperation, if need be with the help of a little pressure by the great powers. Israel would then become a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, between East and West, and a kind of out-patients' department for dispensing Western culture and technical progress to the region in suitable doses. It was also assumed that Arab hostility to Israel was based either on pure misunderstanding,

WITH the Arab world split into pro-Nasser and anti-Nasser camps, Israel's policy remains one of watchful waiting and reliance upon adequate defensive strength. The political and military balance of power is here discussed by A. V. SHERMAN, an experienced political observer and an author of sociological studies on Arab nationalism. Born in London and for the past six years resident in Israel, Mr. Sherman has had firsthand knowledge of Israel's military establishment. He contributed "The Social Roots of Nasser's Egypt" to the November 1957 COMMENTARY.

which would be dispelled by patient explanation, or on anti-Israel incitement by "feudal lords," "reactionaries," and the like, who hoped in this way to divert the stream of popular wrath from the struggle for freedom, economic progress, and international brotherhood. With the inevitable progress of socialism, trade unionism, enlightenment, etc., in the Arab countries, the hand of fraternal friendship would surely be grasped. But as the modern "anti-imperialist," "socialist," and "anti-feudal" movements gained power, hostility to Israel grew both in intensity and in effectiveness, and the old-style "feudal" Arab seemed affectionate by comparison. Meanwhile the Soviet government, undeterred by Israel's desperate efforts at "non-identification," began to harass both her and her co-religionists inside the Soviet Union. The results of Israel's efforts to appeal from time to time to the "world's conscience" at last led her to question whether such an institution really exists.

The beginning of Soviet military aid to Nasser in 1955, and the American government's refusal to allow Israel to purchase modern arms to meet the implied threat, finally destroyed the belief that foreign policies are based on justice, and paved the way to a tacit reformulation of policies, based on four main assumptions: first, that the status quo in the region, including Israel's present frontiers, is extremely unstable and likely to be so for a long time yet; secondly, that Israel must at all times be prepared to face an attack by all the Arab armies combined and that her foreign policy must therefore be oriented first and foremost to insuring an adequate supply of arms and equipment sufficient not only to beat off such an attack but to launch punishing counter-offensives; thirdly, that Israel must develop closer ties with the non-Arab countries in the region; and lastly, that there will always be anti-Nasser groups in NATO, in particular among military circles, prepared to see Israel either as a more reliable partner in the region, or at least as a counter-weight to Nasser: and that it will be possible to find help from such groups.

SHORTLY before the Sinai campaign Nasser had come close to establishing a joint Arab command to undertake military operations against Israel. The subsequent vicissitudes of Arab political life have brought Iraq into his sphere of influence, while putting Jordan out of his reach. Thus at present there is an equilibrium inside the Arab world between pro-Nasser and anti-Nasser forces, which reflects not only their own intrinsic strength but the degree of involvement of the great powers, the uncommitted nations at the UN, and indeed the whole balance of power in the world. This sensitivity of the Middle East to marginal changes in world politics was evinced most clearly at the special General Assembly of the United Nations held during the second and third weeks of August.

It was the belief of the Arabs that President Eisenhower lacked the will or the means to honor the Eisenhower Doctrine, and that the Soviet-Nasserist bloc was the safest side to back. This conviction helped produce a situation where the pro-Western Lebanese and Jordan governments had been seriously undermined and were expected to be overthrown by a combination of internal and external Nasserist attack. The Anglo-American landings, which were spurred by the sudden fall of the Iraqi government, temporarily saved them, but then the landings themselves came under heavy political attack, not only from Nasserist-Soviet sources, but from many quarters inside Britain and the U.S.A. At one time it appeared that the British and American forces would be withdrawn, in which case the Lebanese and Jordan governments would certainly have toppled over. At (and before) the General Assembly, however, a different picture emerged. The large measure of support for the Anglo-American landings not only proved a setback for the Soviet-Nasser bloc, and made the pro-Nasser Jeremiahs in the West look ridiculous, but even surprised the British and American governments themselves. It was indeed a long time since the Anglo-Saxon powers had been so popular. Besides the Jordanian and Lebanese gov-

ernments, Libya, Tunisia, and the Sudan—all of whom fear Nasserist intervention—supported the landings; so naturally did Turkey, Persia, and Pakistan. Other Afro-Asian powers, like Ghana, were benevolent. In view of this line-up, Nehru, who in any case is facing trouble at home, was far less shrill than usual. In the end, the Arab League resolution, unanimously proclaimed by the Assembly, formalized Nasser's setback, and agreed in effect that Anglo-American forces could stay in Jordan and the Lebanon so long as the governments they had come to protect wished them to stay. Not surprisingly, the League's political committee failed to discuss the question: its constitution, which gives every member the power of veto, is an excellent instrument for preventing any action.

The present line-up in the Arab world is as follows: The UAR is backed by Iraq and the Algerian rebel leadership. The ruling dynasty of Yemen has now become a Nasserist satellite, and an enthusiastic convert to the struggle against "corruption and despotism"—outside the Yemen of course—but apart from their vote, and the excuse they give for intervention in the Hadramaut and Aden, the Yemenites are hardly much of an asset. Saudia and Morocco support Nasser up to a point, but he can never be too sure of them. The anti-Nasser group includes the Lebanon and Tunisia—the two most democratic, socially and economically progressive of Arab states, whatever that may be worth—Jordan, Sudan, and Libya, with moral support from the three Moslem powers of the northern tier, Turkey, Persia, Pakistan. Both Libya and the Sudan were under powerful Egyptian pressure before the Nasser regime was installed. Various Wafd and non-Wafd governments in Egypt had been encouraging and subsidizing the anti-British pro-Egyptian movement in Libya. As far as the Sudan is concerned, Cairo wishes to control the Nile waters and appropriate a maximum for her own needs; for many years, too, there has been talk in Egypt of settling some of the surplus agricultural population from Upper Egypt in

the Sudan. Acquisition of the Sudan, moreover, would provide governorships and bureaucratic "outdoor relief" for Egypt's surplus white-collar population. The Sudanese government, on the other hand, needs its land and water for its own increasing population, its white-collar jobs for its own white-collar class, and its ministerial jobs for itself. It is therefore in favor of international or foreign guarantees of one sort or another that Nasser will not be allowed to invade or cause trouble in other Arab states, as he has been doing of late.

Yet so long as the anti-Nasser coalition in the Arab world is dependent on strong nerves in the White House and a favorable international constellation, Israel's political and defense chiefs have to give their main attention to what might happen if the wind veered a few points to the East, and allowed Nasser to take over the whole ramshackle structure. One thing at least is certain: the social, political, and economic weakness of the Middle East makes every Arab country look for patrons abroad, and under present conditions this means one or other of the blocs which alone can supply modern arms and economic aid.

IF NASSER could lay his hands on Jordan, the way would be clear for him to set about redeeming his promise to emulate Saladin and reconquer Palestine for the Arabs. He needs the conquest of Palestine in order to cement his grip on power for several reasons: the main justification of the 1952 revolution was that Farouk and the Wafd had failed in the first Palestine war; also, without Palestine he has no land bridge to the "fertile crescent," and indeed, with Beirut closed to him, his only communications are through the Syrian port of Latakia, by air, or the long sea journey to Basrah.

An Arab commander-in-chief—controlling the Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, and Jordan forces—would have at his disposal about ten infantry and three armored divisions, some fifteen jet-fighter squadrons and two jet-bomber wings, half a dozen destroyers and ten submarines, together with the usual sup-

porting arms, artillery (including self-propelled guns), small arms, minelayers, motor-torpedo boats, etc., etc. The Arab armies are unusually well supplied with heavy tanks and jet planes, to compensate for their inadequate maintenance. They now have close on 500 Soviet T-34 tanks, 80 Stalin Mk.-3's, 80 Pattons and 150 British Centurions, together with several hundred jet fighters, mainly MIG 17's, Vampires, and Sabres, and 50 Ilyushin jet bombers. This alone is well over a billion dollars worth of arms and auxiliary equipment. (The total includes Saudian equipment, which is mostly still in packing cases, but could be shipped to the UAR when needed.) Assuming that up to two-thirds of these forces could be deployed against Israel—leaving the rest to keep order in the rear, watch the other frontiers, and stand by in case of Israeli paratroop or naval landings—Israel would have to be prepared to face an attack by some half a dozen infantry and two armored divisions, backed by the larger part of the Arab air force, naval support (mainly attacks on shipping, tip-and-run bombardments, small commando landings) and squads of *fedayeen* (suicide commandos). There are ample invasion routes for forces of this size.

TO CREATE forces of more or less similar magnitude, Israel has developed the reserve army system. This, briefly, is based on civilian manpower drawn from universal "reserve-conscription" and permanently organized into units and formations, with headquarters and support troops, which can be mobilized and concentrated within a matter of hours; the standing army of conscripts with a regular cadre exists primarily to train and organize the reserves, to produce trained replacements for the latter, and help provide a screen behind which they could be mobilized and deployed; there is a women's service to release a maximum number of men for fighting units; the standing army constitutes a screen, based—in addition to the regular formations—on frontier settlements, the air-striking force, and intelligence. The object of the screen is to give the re-

serves time to mobilize, equip, and deploy. All Israeli residents up to the age of about fifty are liable for service in the reserves, and the main fighting units are based on those among the lower age groups who saw service in the standing army, while the higher age groups serve mainly in service and auxiliary units, area defense, staff and administrative posts. Israeli population statistics show about a quarter of a million Jewish males in the twenty-four age groups (above forty the numbers of reservists fall off rapidly). When allowance is made for the medically unfit, essential services, etc., this gives some idea of the order of magnitude of the reserve army. Unmarried and childless women are liable for reserve duty up to their early thirties, but with the average age of marriage at twenty-two, their number dwindles rapidly above the early twenties.

Conscription is in force for males from the ages of seventeen and one half to twenty-nine, and for unmarried women from seventeen and one half to twenty-seven. An unusually high proportion of men in each age group is mobilized; the remainder consists mainly of medical rejects and those whose call-up is deferred for study purposes. This latter group includes members of extreme religious groups who are permanently deferred on the grounds that they continue to study the Law all their lives. The majority of Orthodox and observant Jews, of course, serve as officers and other ranks with the same measure of devotion as their less religious comrades. There are quite a few in the paratrooper units, and in general there is no religious problem in the army. New immigrants of up to twenty-nine are conscripted, and a trickle of those whose service was deferred help make up the number. The proportion of women called up is considerably smaller, since many girls claim exemption on religious grounds, a privilege extracted by the clericalist parties (though by no means all religious girls claim exemption and not all those who exploit the provision are religious). The rest include those who are already married, nurses and other essential workers, and those who obtain de-

ferment for further study. The army does not always call up girls who lack the necessary educational qualifications, intelligence, or knowledge of Hebrew required for technical and administrative posts, and those whose cultural level and home background may cause them difficulty in fitting into army life. This includes new immigrants from Islamic countries in particular. There are two conflicting considerations at work here. From the point of view of the army, such girls mean more expense and trouble than they are worth, and since they will marry and have children shortly after demobilization, and will therefore be exempted from reserve duties, they are not worth the "investment" put into male conscripts from backward countries in the form of education and training, on the grounds that their value as reservists will grow as they become more "Israelized" in the course of their civilian life. On the other hand, since the girls will be mothers of a future generation of soldiers (and the birth rate of these groups is usually high), one influential school of thought considers that the educational benefits they derive from their service justifies conscripting them, even if the army does not always gain so much from their services.

AS IN all armies, the tone is set by the officer corps, which can be divided into four main categories. The senior officers acquired their military experience before the Palestine war, in the Haganah, or British and other foreign armies; they later built up the defense forces as they went along. Most of them now have the best part of twenty years military activity behind them, from illegal training activities to command of formations. The medium ranks consist mainly of officers who joined the army during or after the Palestine war of 1948 and stayed on to make it their career. The subalterns are mainly conscripts who were commissioned during the course of their service. The reserve officers may belong to any one of the three categories.

The need for a large number of officers to man the conscript and reserve units, as

well as the country's equalitarian outlook, insures fair consideration to all potential officer material irrespective of economic or educational background. Most of the young officers were born or brought up in the country and had a high school education of some sort. (This includes members of the kibbutzim and veteran agricultural settlements, all of whom attend school until call-up age, though the higher age groups do agricultural work into the bargain. The agricultural schools also account for a fairly high proportion of officer-cadets, as they have always done.) About half of the young officers in one large sample came from veteran agricultural settlements. Officer-cadets are chosen after a period of service in the ranks and have to do well in the NCO's battle-course. In spite of severe selectivity, a substantial number are rejected during the tough officers' course.

There are no statistics available on what proportion of officers are of Oriental origin, a question which is so often asked. For one thing, ethnic or communal origin of soldiers, as distinct from their place of birth, is not recorded on their documents. Furthermore, no one is quite sure how to define "Oriental" and "European," where to include Sephardi Jews from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, and how to deal with children of "mixed" marriages—which make up some 12 per cent of all marriages. Yet a rough check in an officers' training school and one or two units showed that a growing number of cadets and officers were of Oriental origin. When one takes into account the high proportion of new immigrants from Oriental countries who did not receive schooling in Israel (or received none at all anywhere) and the fairly low proportion who continued their education after leaving elementary school, the present arrangement seems very reasonable. In fact there has been a tendency, encouraged by Ben Gurion, to press for increasing the number of officers from Oriental families wherever possible.

The feeling that commissions are given to those who are most fitted to hold them is an important constituent of morale in an

equalitarian country like Israel. On the whole, officers live very modestly—their salaries are linked to civil service scales, though they work a good deal harder. Regular officers serve on short-term contracts which are not renewed unless the officers live up to expectations and develop in accordance to their growing seniority and rank. The high demands on officers, and the success of the higher command, especially in the Sinai campaign, has helped produce that mutual confidence between ranks at all levels which has provided the main basis for military morale. Civilian morale, in the sense of a belief in the justice or necessity of the army's aims, is also present to a very high degree. Communists apart, there are very few who question the overwhelming importance of military preparedness against Arab attack. There are several indications of the high level of Israeli morale, besides the actual success in the Sinai campaign: the low number of desertions and the satisfactory turn-out for reserve duty; the large numbers of officers and men who turned up at their units during the Sinai campaign without being called up, and refused to take no for an answer; the fact that all units, down to the smallest, actually went into attack under fire when they were ordered to, is the best indication of effective morale. That most men look forward to their annual service in the reserves is a well-known fact, whatever its explanation.

SINCE Israel can manufacture only small arms, its heavy armaments are very much the same as the Arabs. It has better and more up-to-date jets, though far less of them; at the time of writing its standard tank, the Sherman with a 75 mm gun mounted on it, is out-gunned as well as being less heavily armored than the Stalins, T-34's, Pattons, and Centurions of the Arabs. It lacks submarines, and has less of almost everything than the Arabs. This situation is now expected to change for the better. Ben Gurion recently stated that Israel's efforts to obtain newer arms have been meeting considerable though not com-

plete success; the U.S. government has announced that the sale of certain defensive arms is now going on. Some of the weak spots, therefore, are being seen to; though the cost, direct and indirect, is high.

In spite of their inferiority in numbers and equipment, the Israeli defense chiefs are confident that they could defeat a combined Arab attack, and mount a counter-offensive within a few days which would be capable of capturing vital enemy centers. Their appreciation is based on the experience of the Sinai campaign and the usual sources on which defense staffs base their work. As they see it, the great weakness of the Arab armies lies in their officer corps. Whatever the impression of dynamism and virility which Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi officer-politicians may make on visitors from abroad (e.g., "friends of the Middle East," or British Labor MP's, and old ladies of both sexes), they make a poor showing where military leadership and powers of command are concerned. Most of them are politicians first and soldiers second. Senior officers of Arab armies have always spent more time playing at politics than insuring that the formations under their command were engaged in training and exercises, that the men were being looked after, and that their junior officers were made to stay with their units. Army life is strenuous and nasty at the best: the weather is too hot or too cold or too wet; desert and mountains are equally unpleasant, cultivated land even more so. It is so much easier to sit in the shade and turn commanding into a business of reading and writing reports—or go to town and visit friends for a chat on politics—than to visit units, and force the officers to train their men and themselves.

If this situation was grim enough for the Arabs during the years which led up to the Palestine war in 1948 (when officers not only proved incapable of commanding their units and formations but very often did not even try and deserted when things went bad) it has deteriorated still further since the "rising young forces" took over. If it was formerly the prerogative of officers from

the rank of colonel and above to play at politics, they now begin from the rank of lieutenant. Cairo has an irresistible attraction for the Egyptian officers; they come there to intercede for relatives and friends, to do business, to find out if any new enterprise is interested in acquiring them as a partner—officers are worth having nowadays—or just to feel important. As for the Syrian army, it has undergone so many purges during recent years that it has neglected training; it has based promotions on political criteria to such an extent that even the Egyptian high command was appalled by the quality of the senior officers that it found when unification of the armies was begun. In Jordan, the Arab Legion, which was formerly the best of the Arab armies, has undergone three serious purges and many minor ones during the past few years: after 1951, in 1957 when pro-British officers were purged, and again in 1958 when pro-Nasserists were purged in turn. Captains and lieutenants of a couple of years ago are now colonels and brigadiers, without having acquired either the knowledge or the experience required for their new appointments. Training and maneuvers have suffered owing to the army's use for internal security purposes and its politicization.

Historically speaking there are two kinds of officer corps which can provide adequate leadership in a modern army. One kind is based on aristocratic families with a long tradition of military service to their country, a sense of duty and loyalty. The other is the kind of officer corps in a democratic or revolutionary army where the officers either grow up with the army in the course of battle, or are chosen from among the recruits on the basis of qualities of leadership, determination, ability, and courage. The Arab armies belong to neither of these two categories. The majority of their officer corps originates from lower-middle-class families, whose sons after finishing secondary school are attracted by the army as a career because training at the military academy is free, and is only a year and a half as against three or four at the university,

and where a secure career awaits them, providing that they are not so hopeless as to be expelled from the course. (The Jordanian army was tougher on its officers, hence their dislike of Glubb.) Under Farouk the officers in Egypt led an easy life, which gave them plenty of time to talk politics; since then they have had an even easier one, with higher prestige, more "public appearances," and a "political" atmosphere which makes senior officers reluctant to make enemies of men under their command by disciplining them, in view of the fact that they might need their support at some future date.

Another factor which undermines discipline in the Arab armies is the widespread homosexuality rife in these countries. Whatever the ethical and social problem of homosexual relations between consenting adult civilians, they have a ruinous effect on discipline in Arab armies, where officers and NCO's exploit their soldiers for this purpose, and where such relations can exist between officers of different rank in the same unit. A substantial proportion of Arab soldiers who deserted to the Israeli forces during "peacetime" did so because their commander or NCO was pressing homosexual attentions on them, and they found no other way of escaping them. (This, furthermore, tells us something about the state of the army in general.)

ARMIES can never be better than the personal character of their officers permits. An article by an Egyptian secondary school teacher in the Cairo daily *Al-Gumhuriya* last November complained that cheating is prevalent in schools and in all walks of life, and that not only is there no moral opprobrium attached to it, but that no effort is made to stop it. Now one of the great weaknesses of the Egyptian and Syrian armies is that Egyptian officers quite uninhibitedly hand up misleading reports about their units, the state of their training, fortifications, and even battles. Since the recipients are loath to visit the units (especially when the enemy is near, or the *khamseen* is blowing) they pass the infor-

mation in their hands on upwards, often with additional embellishments of their own. As a result GHQ is never quite sure of what is going on, in peace or war. Both the British and German training missions with the Egyptians (and with the Syrians too in the latter case) complained about this habit, but found that there was nothing they could do about it. Parallel with the habit of deception from lower to higher levels there is misleading propaganda from the top downwards. For the past few years the Egyptian high command has been misleading its own officers (not to mention the public) about the comparative strength of Egypt and Israel. Military lecturers have been sent round to Egyptian and foreign armies to prove that the Egyptian army defeated the Israelis during the Sinai campaign, and were subsequently forced to retreat by the British and French. Some officers cannot help knowing from their own experience how false this Arabian Nights propaganda is; others, on the contrary, have been known to ask: "If we are so strong, what are we waiting for?" Such things inevitably undermine the confidence of officers in the higher command.

Contrary to what had been expected, the battle morale of the "revolutionary" armies is no better than it was before the revolution. The Egyptian peasant, who still provides the army with its rank and file, is the same as he ever was: ignorant and apathetic. A few have received land in the reform, or may know someone who received land; the regime talks about improving conditions for the common soldier and improving relations between the ranks, but the flush of good intentions passed without anything more effective than pep-talks which went well above the soldiers' heads in most cases. Until the officers and soldiers themselves change, relations between them will remain pretty much the same. But to change the Egyptian soldier means first of all changing economic, social, sanitary, and educational conditions in the Egyptian countryside from top to bottom. Then the right sort of recruit would come, in another couple of decades. How-

ever, such changes would require enormous expenditure, and meanwhile the money is going into war and politics instead. But then, were the regime to engage in such policies, it would hardly need an army at all; it would have good relations with the whole world for the asking. (The Syrian peasant is healthier and naturally a better soldier than the Egyptian, but his officers are a poor lot.)

There has been a good deal of talk about inducting the bulk of the educated classes into the army; the result should be interesting. If the Nasser regime's pep-talks and morale pamphlets (whose style owes something to Communist propaganda) are above the heads of the rank and file, they often do more harm than good where the NCO's and officers are concerned. They present war as a heroic affair, where the soldiers would march forward in serried ranks with bands and banners, overrun the cowardly Jews in one dramatic battle, and then march back home again like heroes, with nothing worse than a few bandages to show, to the plaudits of the population. From interrogation of prisoners taken during the Sinai campaign it transpires that the difference between this picture—which was firmly implanted into their consciousness—and the noise, chaos, tension, surprise, heat, and general nastiness of battle, helped cause a collapse of morale.

OWING to the low level of leadership, energy, discipline, and training in the Arab armies, their abundance of armaments and numerical superiority are less terrifying than would appear at first sight. For example, though they can learn to drive tanks adequately, fire guns, and work the radio, they lack effective commanders for tank units and formations. It takes a high degree of physical fitness, nerves, courage, and coolness to direct a tank battle from inside a tank; the commander's tank, needless to say, should be well forward. This explains why the Israeli armored forces were able to defeat the Egyptians in Sinai, though the latter outgunned them and had heavier armor. The same holds good for air combat. The

Israeli air force has learned to refer to Arab pilots as "plane-chauffeurs" in the sense that they can fly the planes but they are not fighter pilots. In Sinai they had a numerical superiority of about five to one in planes of more or less the same quality (Israel opinion holds the French Mystère to be rather better than the MIG's the Egyptians had, but there is not a great deal in it), but the Israelis never lost a single jet in the battles in which they won air superiority before the British and French intervened. As far as infantry is concerned, the best measure will always be provided by the battle casualties in Sinai. An unusually high proportion of Israeli casualties were officers, not only platoon commanders, but company and battalion commanders, and even one brigade commander. Israeli platoon and company commanders are expected to lead their units into battle, not command them from behind; battalion commanders are expected to control their unit from well forward, and to lead it into battle in case of emergency. This demands a high degree of physical fitness as well as courage and leadership. With such commanders even average troops respond well.

Now the poor quality of the Arab armies has important implications for the regime itself and for Israeli policy. The character and efficiency of the armed forces have a bearing on every society and its stability, but in the case of a military dictatorship, even more so than elsewhere. The Nasser regime based its claim to power primarily on the old regime's military failure and on promises to build a strong army which would "liberate" Palestine. Failure to do so cannot help having political consequences as time goes on. This appreciation has important implications for Israeli foreign policy. If there can be no substantial changes in morale, discipline, leadership, and numbers of the Arab armies during the next few years, then the decisive variable is armaments. The beginnings of a reserve-unit system have been introduced into the Egyptian and Syrian armies, but it will take some time to see how they work out in practice. This as-

sumes that the Arabs do not receive direct operational assistance from the European Communist countries in the form of air, tank, and submarine crews, which would verge on a Soviet invasion of Israel and would become a matter of international concern.

THE implication is that Israel's foreign policy must be directed first and foremost to insuring access to the quantity and quality of modern armaments necessary to keep up with Nasser's, at prices Israel can afford to pay. All other foreign policy questions pale into insignificance in comparison. This need, and its realization by the policy-makers, has coincided with the growing prominence of the Ministry of Defense in foreign policy making and execution. This change is epitomized by the active diplomatic role of the Director General of the Ministry, Simon Peres. Peres, in his early thirties, is one of Ben Gurion's "young men"; he rose to his present position from that of head of the Armament and Equipment Procurement Division of the Ministry. His influence and participation in diplomacy—sometimes accompanied by friction with the Foreign Ministry—has been paramount in the developments which led to the ousting of Sharett from the post of Foreign Minister in 1956, and to the post-Sharett orientation, including the understanding with French military and political circles which permitted Israel to receive arms and later other benefits too. He has taken a leading part in the new policy of orientation towards other NATO countries, through military as well as diplomatic channels, which have made armaments and other military aid, rather than "sympathy" or diplomatic support, the prior desideratum.

These developments have been facilitated, or even to some extent evoked, by a change in Western strategic thinking. In contrast to the growing cold war weariness, pessimism, defeatism, and pro-Nasserism which still characterize much of the West's political thinking—and in particular socialist and liberal circles—military quarters are now

more optimistic concerning the outcome of the cold war arms race against Russia. Impressive though Russian ballistic-missile advances may be, they are not yet operational, whereas the United States strategic air force with its string of bases round the world is, and its missile development is doing well. At the same time the belief that Nasser can be appeased is being steadily eroded by experience. Claims that Nasser could cut off European oil supplies are not taken seriously by experts. For one thing, oil production potential far exceeds demand and is growing rapidly. Iran, which lost markets during the Mossadegh spree, is out to regain them. During 1957 she increased production from 26 to 35 million tons, while Iraq's fell from 31 to 22 million. Were Iraqi oil to be lost to the West, Persia could make up most of the loss. Provided that the West can retain either Saudian or Kuweit supplies, together with Persian oil, it can insure European oil supplies, using giant tankers (which will otherwise be lying idle) round the Cape route.

Together with a stronger policy in general, the NATO chiefs are slowly coming to accept the idea that it is worth helping Israel, if only to use her as a bogeyman with which to threaten Nasser. In theory, the exploitation of these opportunities would need a considerable change in attitude on the part of the Israeli government and public opinion alike. In fact, the public is so defense-minded that so long as any specific action is presented as being essential to defense, it can be sure of overwhelming support among the population. True, the neutralists of both left and center (Communists, and fellow-traveling parties like Mapam and Ahduth Avoda, together with the World Zionist President Nahum Goldman) issue manifestos demanding "non-identification," "non-intervention," and "integration into the region." But they never dare oppose any specific policies where defense and diplomatic considerations are interwoven, as they almost invariably are nowadays. Their last attempt to oppose the government over arms purchases from

Germany a year ago led to political defeat. Moreover, though the slogan of "integration into the region" is accepted in theory by everyone, its sponsors are at a loss to explain what it means in terms of the divided Middle East of today.

The government's permission to American and British planes to use Israeli air space for their help to Jordan (even though they handled it unnecessarily clumsily from the public relations point of view, as they so often do) did not create much of a problem inside Israel, in spite of severe misgivings about the possibility of a British double-cross, and the sharpness with which the Soviet government reacted. A few years ago the idea of welcoming Western landings in the area would have seemed rather wicked to most Israelis, right, left, and center. Today, though nobody admits to having changed his views or *Weltanschauung*, it seems the lesser evil to most.

ISRAEL is now looking forward to a period of steadily improving relationships with the non-Arab states of the Middle East, which outnumber the Arabs of the region, are stronger militarily, and less unstable politically. Relations between Israel and the "northern tier" powers are influenced considerably by Western policies in the Middle East. When American and British policy was oriented towards appeasement of Nasser and of Arab xenophobia in general, the Baghdad Pact powers were expected to avoid "embarrassing" these efforts. Now that the Western powers are in conflict with Nasser, and Iraq is in effect no longer a member of the Baghdad Pact, Turkey, Persia, and Pakistan have a freer hand in choosing their allies.

A few years ago the prospect of a long-drawn-out period of non-acceptance by the Arabs would have seemed almost unsupportable to Israeli policy-making circles and public alike. Everyone was certain that peace and "normalization" would be achieved; the only question was how and on what terms. By now, no one discusses the matter. The new officers' regimes are known to be cor-

rupt, nasty, and militarist, without even being efficient. Since they are not revolutionizing the social structure, but appear to have replaced one corrupt ruling class by another, and instead of remedying the uglier traits of Arab character and society, are merely intensifying them, Israeli policy-makers are coming to the conclusion that things are unlikely to be either very much better or very much worse than before. This realization does not necessarily mean that Israeli policy-makers, diplomats, and political intelligence quarters are inherently wiser or better informed than their counterparts in the West. But they have lived longer in the Middle East; the present ruling strata personally remember the Young Turk revolution of 1908, the great enthusiasm it roused among the national minorities and the liberals (more or less the same thing) including the Jews of Palestine, and the subsequent disillusion when Enver and Talat Pashas proved to be more savage and bigoted than the Sultan Abdul Hamid, even though the Young Turks started out with more or less the same phrases as Nasser, Serraj, and Qassem. Israelis who deal with foreign affairs were always aware of those traits in Arab character and society whose eradication will be necessary before social systems and foreign policies can really be changed. So long as utopian mythology regarding Israel-Arab relations was obligatory, this knowledge had to be "repressed," or at least kept in a separate compartment of the mind. But now it is flooding back very strongly into current thinking.

This approach assumes that there will not be a full-scale Soviet invasion of the area or a third world war, since in either of these two eventualities all policies become meaningless. In general, Israeli policy-makers have not yet found a conceptual framework in which to analyze and react to Soviet words and actions in the area; perhaps they are hampered too much by indignation and disappointment. At all events, they not only do not speak about the Soviet Union where they can avoid it, they even avoid thinking about it. ("Why should we go out of our way to provoke the Russians when we can never be sure that the Americans will back us up" is a common rationalization.)

But world wars apart, Israel has become reconciled to indefinite non-acceptance in a permanently unstable Middle East, and the problem of obtaining up-to-date jet planes has ousted the endeavor to convince Moslem and Christian alike that Israel is a country deserving of affection—"eager to love and be loved" was a phrase used in all seriousness by one of Mr. Sharett's right-hand men not so long ago. The change is encouraging, if only because the acquisition of jet planes is possible, whereas the earlier aspirations were not. Indeed, the most reassuring thing about these new developments is that they did not originate from any global reappraisal or theoretical reformulation—many of their authors would even deny that their basic approach has changed at all during the decade—but simply out of a reaction to needs and opportunities.